



[Dems Again Block Broadcaster Freedom Act](#)

by Rep. Greg Walden and Rep. Mike Pence

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The American people love a fair fight, especially where the issues of the day are being debated. In a free market, fairness should always be determined based upon equality of opportunity, not equality of results. Everyone should have a chance to make their case.

However, liberals controlling the White House and the Congress in Washington seem to have different ideas. We've seen the federal government take over insurance companies, banks, automakers and now they're pushing for a takeover of health care. But that's not all; they also want to control your radio dial.

This notion of a government takeover of the airwaves is anathema to the American experience. Americans cherish their freedom because it is their blood-bought right. That was why the FCC, under the Reagan administration, repealed the so-called Fairness Doctrine back in 1987.

Enacted in 1949 when just 2,881 radio stations were in operation, this censorship doctrine actually regulated the content of radio and limited the ability of radio stations from discussing controversial topics by imposing standards of time, balance and record-keeping; as a result, talk radio as we know it today virtually did not exist before 1987.

Recognizing the chilling effect that the regulation was having on broadcast freedom, the FCC

began actually to overturn its own ruling on the Fairness Doctrine in 1985. Following that change in policy and President Reagan's veto of attempts to reinstate it, the results have been dramatic.

Today, about 14,000 radio stations are in operation, in addition to cable, satellite and the Internet. Access to news and diversity of opinions has never been more abundant.

Bringing back the Fairness Doctrine today would amount to government control over political views expressed on the public airways. We believe that it is dangerous to suggest that a government bureaucracy would be a competent arbiter of free speech. As two former radio industry professionals, we know personally what the 'Fairness Doctrine' did to radio when it was in place, and that, if reinstated, it would ultimately muzzle what is the dynamic public discussion that we call talk radio in America today.

Yet this government control is precisely what some of the most powerful and prominent Democrats in Washington are advocating for, from Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, to Senators Dick Durbin, Dianne Feinstein and John Kerry.

Let's be clear: their target is the free speech that exists on conservative and faith-oriented talk radio. But liberal talk show hosts wouldn't escape the net of sweeping new government regulation.

While Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Laura Ingraham and other conservative voices are associated most commonly with talk radio, the truth is that in the totality of the talk radio marketplace, from the local, to regional and national levels there is an extraordinary diversity of opinion. Many progressive, moderate and liberal programs succeed extraordinarily well at the local level in many markets around the country.

The 'Fairness Doctrine' represents an existential threat not just to conservative talk radio, but to all talk radio: left, right or center. In fact, Jon Stinton, the founding president of liberal Air America Radio wrote in The Wall Street Journal that he agreed with us, not the Democrats in Washington, D.C., when it came to the question of government censorship. "The Fairness Doctrine is an anachronistic policy that, with the abundance of choices on radio today, is entirely unnecessary," he wrote.

Thanks to the support of millions of freedom-loving Americans, we took a stand against the so-called Fairness Doctrine with a bipartisan vote in the House of Representatives in 2007, sending a clear signal that a front-door government takeover of the airwaves was not welcome in the People's House, although that protection of free speech expired in March of this year.

So now there is an attempt underway to sneak through the back door with new proposed rules at the FCC known as "broadcast localism." These regulations are just a Trojan Horse for unelected bureaucrats in Washington determining what you can or cannot listen to.

These proposed regulations would force broadcasters to air programming that fits pre-ordained categories and create permanent oversight boards that could be stocked with agenda-driven activists. In short, talk radio and would be burdened with clearing government red tape, leaving competing mainstream media to operate without comparable government interference.

A total of 105 members of the House of Representatives sent a letter to the FCC opposing these proposed regulations, including 14 Democrats.

In light of all this, we tried to offer the Walden-Pence Broadcaster Freedom Amendment last week to prevent the Federal Communications Commission from reinstating the so-called 'Fairness Doctrine' and enacting proposed broadcast localism regulations for the next fiscal year. We believed this was an important opportunity for this Congress to reassure all Americans that the airwaves of America would remain free from government censorship for at least the next fiscal year, but the Democrat leadership in the House of Representatives refused to allow a simple up-or-down vote.

While we are profoundly disappointed in the partisan gamesmanship that denied this straightforward amendment, we are still confident that broadcast freedom will ultimately prevail and that we will send government censorship of the airwaves to the ash heap of broadcast history, where it belongs.

Our hope springs from the overwhelming encouragement of thousands of Americans voicing their support for the Walden-Pence amendment and we are certain that it is only a matter of

time before the specter of government censorship of the airwaves is dismantled forever.